Characters

- Estelle
- Eddie
- Doctor
- Marie
- Figure

Act

*The actors are **EDDIE**, a young man in a business suit; the **DOCTOR**, also in suit and tie, and two women who might be secretaries, but who in fact are something else — **ESTELLE** and **MARIE**. They all slowly enter a large room that seems to be a kind of office. And yet there is something artificial about it. Flags hang from a high ceiling. Many clocks on the wall, many tables and chairs, and on either side padded sections of wall, against which the actors occasionally bounce. A few microphones stand about. This is an office, but also a studio of some kind where art is made, practiced, and produced.*

The stage is strewn with crumpled-up newspaper. When the actors walk through it, we can hear the noise it makes.

The actors are all wearing body mikes (headset style, so they can speak very quietly), so when the Soft Voice of the narrator comes over the loudspeaker, its quality is not unlike the quality of the actors miked voices. Sometimes the actors will also cross and speak into the visible microphones, which have a somewhat different quality from the sound of the body mikes that will normally transmit their quiet voices to the spectators. Different loops of soft music play now and throughout most of the play.

*After a pause, all the actors but **ESTELLE** run from the room. Then, after another pause, **EDDIE** reenters slowly, and faces **ESTELLE** tentatively.*

ESTELLE

(Into a microphone)

Oh, Eddie, you're less conventional than you believe.

(Pause)

Do something, Eddie. Do something to surprise us.

*(**ESTELLE** strides out of the room. Eddie moves, then hesitates)*

SOFT VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKER

Oh, Eddie, make a surprising move, right in front of our very eyes.

(The others return quickly, and cover their eyes)

EDDIE

My speaking alone pleases me.

DOCTOR

You're big on speaking, but not on communication.

EDDIE

That's because happiness floats into my language. Like a dream. Probably you're quite blind to that fact, but okay, I smile so much it hurts.

DOCTOR

What city is this?

*(**EDDIE** exits, the others run about, one holding a small curtain on a stick, like a tiny theater curtain, and **EDDIE** pushes through that curtain in order to exit, and another strides across a tabletop, as the **VOICE** speaks over this flurry of activity, and someone tries to pose in a suddenly visible spotlight beam and is quickly pulled away)*

SOFT VOICE

The theater, the perverse theater, the joyous theater, the noble theater, abandoned finally. And something else takes its place. Talking in the dark. Inhabiting rooms with no access, in this location a god will manifest himself. His presence already intimated in this vibrating light and temperature. But the time, far off of course, of his true manifestation. An unplaceable time.

*(**EDDIE** reenters)*

EDDIE

I want something . . . out of the ordinary to happen.

DOCTOR

Be patient, Eddie. A god will manifest in this very room.

EDDIE

Will I recognize him?

MARIE

You're a mirror, Eddie.

EDDIE

A mirror?

ESTELLE

So is the world, Eddie. Bounce back and forth.

*(**EDDIE** turns away from **ESTELLE**, and somehow hits the padded wall he hadn't expected to run into, and*

*bounces back into the room as the **VOICE** speaks)*

SOFT VOICE

He looks into a mirror, tries to comb his hair, but it isn't there. So much for the surface of things, he says, but I don't cry, I just try to balance good on my own side of a spinning what-d-ya-call-it? And nobody could tell if I fell off the bed because it happened so fast I came in a seeming wink of the eye but who winked? Nobody I know. But then, I don't know everybody. I'm too much into milk, chocolate, and sometimes, maybe, a slice of apple pie. Who'll join me?

ESTELLE

*(She has mounted a table, and holds an apple to **EDDIE**, as in the rear **MARIE** and **DOCTOR** seem to be engaging in some kind of perverse practice that involves **MARIE** striking poses on what seems to be a wooden rack)*

This perfect apple is not edible, Eddie.

SOFT VOICE

What's really happening?

ESTELLE

You're anticipating.

EDDIE

What?

ESTELLE

The arrival of somebody invisible. He or she will walk onto the stage —

EDDIE

What stage?

ESTELLE

— but you won't know it happened. Don't cry, Eddie.

(She jumps down from the table and runs off, as do the

***DOCTOR** and **MARIE. EDDIE** starts to follow, then stops and crosses to a microphone. He bends down to speak quietly into the mike)*

EDDIE

I arrived at the theater for a performance: I opened my eyes, I took my fists, which had been jammed into my two ears, away from my ears. I was ready to be . . . filled with images and words that would have upon me, great purgative emotional effect. And then, the theater was taken away. Wiped out. Totally. And I was left with nothing into which I could plunge . . . with my emotional identification. I was left with nothing to think about.

DOCTOR

*(Who has tiptoed in carrying a box he quietly places on a table across from **EDDIE**)*

What are you frightened of, Eddie?

EDDIE

Nothing I can put my finger on. What's in that box?

DOCTOR

Something to eat. Take a look.

*(**EDDIE** tentatively peeks, and the **DOCTOR** whispers)*

Dig in, Eddie. It's lunch.

EDDIE

(Ecstatically, sitting)

It looks . . . wonderful.

DOCTOR

Do you really think so?

EDDIE

But is it lunchtime already?

DOCTOR

Haven't you noticed? It's much later than that.

*(He goes; **EDDIE** as if "wakes" from his ecstasy)*

EDDIE

What did you say?

SOFT VOICE

The next thing I knew, I was flooded with richness, that had no content. Blank fullness. And in that blankness, because it was full, there was a

continual, yet totally evasive, multitude of things that left me as quietly as they arose.

EDDIE

*(He's been smiling as if the soft **VOICE** was speaking for him. Then he makes a hand gesture)*

Zip: except it was faster than that. And I was perfectly, fulfilled.

*(**ESTELLE** and **MARIE** have placed themselves on the rack, which is in shadows)*

ESTELLE

Oh, Eddie, turning yourself into a work of art?

EDDIE

Well, if I looked out the window —

ESTELLE

I don't see a window.

MARIE

(Smiles to herself)

Zip.

DOCTOR

(Sticking his head back into the room)

Poetry City?

ESTELLE

Convince me.

DOCTOR

(Entering)

Let me introduce you to a man who tried to encase himself in a work of art. Oh, said the Doctor. I can help this man escape from a work of art, but only if he genuinely wishes to do that.

ESTELLE

Office party!

*(She hits a table bell, and she and **MARIE** run from the room, giggling)*

DOCTOR

Understand, Eddie. I'm not a real doctor. Exercises into something quite unobtainable, that's what I'm into. So here you are in Poetry City, but under false premises.

EDDIE

I don't think so.

DOCTOR

Please don't be angry when your anticipations are frustrated. Anger reaps no permanent rewards.

EDDIE

I know that.

DOCTOR

Dare I ask what the goal is, Eddie?

EDDIE

I'll never tell.

(Pause)

I want to take over the world.

(A strident female voice is heard over the loudspeakers: "Excuse me!" Eddie looks about, startled)

DOCTOR

*(After **EDDIE** is quiet)*

I'll never tell.

EDDIE

I want to take over the world by getting control of myself.

DOCTOR

What should I teach, Eddie — free-floating attention?

EDDIE

What does that mean?

DOCTOR

It means — what hurts doesn't, even though it hurts.

EDDIE

Sounds good.

DOCTOR

You don't know what you're talking about, Eddie.

EDDIE

You have other patients?

DOCTOR

Didn't I tell you? I'm not a doctor.

*(He opens a filing cabinet drawer to take out a blindfold, and he puts it over **EDDIE'S** eyes)*

EDDIE

Maybe I should tell you I spend my days worshiping my approaching blindness.

DOCTOR

Why worship that, Eddie?

EDDIE

It seems perverse.

DOCTOR

Something I said?

EDDIE

I think blindness will send me deeper into myself. Make me stronger than I am.

DOCTOR

It might hurt.

EDDIE

I suppose it might hurt.

(Holds a beat, then suddenly covers his ears)

DOCTOR

Hear something unusual?

(He slams shut a filing cabinet drawer)

EDDIE

(Uncovers ears and takes off blindfold)

What was that?

DOCTOR

Time for explosions, Eddie.

EDDIE

Metaphorically, of course?

DOCTOR

If you say so.

EDDIE

Internally explosive.

DOCTOR

If you say so.

EDDIE

Nobody but me would notice.

DOCTOR

I wouldn't notice?

EDDIE

(Pause)

Does the devil withstand evil?

DOCTOR

The devil's supposed to be evil personified.

EDDIE

But can he withstand evil?

DOCTOR

That remains to be seen.

EDDIE

Can you tell whether or not I exploded?

DOCTOR

An educated guess?

EDDIE

Guess.

DOCTOR

Guess my guess.

EDDIE

I'm not up to that.

DOCTOR

Then don't expect that for no reason at all, I'll start giving away my secrets, Eddie. Especially since you wouldn't benefit in the least.

(Pause)

By the way, I'm not the devil.

EDDIE

You just gave away a secret.

DOCTOR
Ah. Then maybe I'll give away one more.
I can withstand evil, when I want to.
EDDIE

Maybe my question . . . was, Can it be resisted?

DOCTOR

Ah. Not the same thing, is it? But I don't have to tell that to Eddie.

EDDIE

Tell me everything.

DOCTOR

Careful, Eddie. "Bravado" is a word nobody should memorize.

*(An explosion. **EDDIE** goes to door)*

DOCTOR

Did you do that, Eddie?

*(**ESTELLE** and **MARIE** run on, each spins one of two strange wheels attached to logs strapped to sawhorses)*

ESTELLE

Office party!

SOFT VOICE

*(As the **VOICE** speaks, **EDDIE** tries to compose himself at one of the tables, and **MARIE** and **ESTELLE** run to the rack that houses a small curtained box perched on top. They lift an edge of the curtain as if to invite **EDDIE** to peek, but as he*

*advances, they run back to sit at the table, and **EDDIE** loses courage and finds his way back to the table, to sit and try and compose himself across from their provocative presences)*

Eddie went to Poetry City. The soft air, gray and granulated, offered itself to his sniff. Somebody must be burning logs, said Eddie. But in fact, he was wrong. Global forces were at work, but Eddie was localized. He

opened a local window, and before he could open a local window, something came whirling into his mind's eye like a photograph of the whole planet from a place far in space. Look, there's Poetry City under a cloud of fog — Oh Eddie, from where you sit, it's so atmospheric to be looking at the sun bursting into the city through clouds of soft fog. Eddie realized that by midday the air would be clear, and Poetry City would be like any place else. Would it still be Poetry City? Of course, offered Marie. Maps don't change.

*(**MARIE** and **ESTELLE** again spin the wheels and then run from the room)*

Maps don't change. Maps don't change.

*(**EDDIE** runs to hide his head behind the curtain that hangs down from the box over the rack)*

DOCTOR

Use your head better than that, Eddie.

EDDIE

(He reappears, tentatively)

How could I?

DOCTOR
Cover more territory, then
you wouldn't suffer your normal anguish.
EDDIE

Oh?

DOCTOR

That sounds tentative, Eddie.

EDDIE

I've been promised similar things, on other occasions.

DOCTOR

Disappointed?

EDDIE

Other times.

DOCTOR

But Eddie keeps trying.

EDDIE

Didn't you recommend certain exercises?

DOCTOR

Not me.

EDDIE

You said that if I —

DOCTOR
I know perfectly well what I said, Eddie.
Cover more territory.
Try using your head like a bicycle

(He spins his fists, as if they were pedaling)

EDDIE

(Frowns)

That could be interpreted in different ways.

DOCTOR

I hope so.

*(Door opens; **MARIE** is there)*

MARIE

Eddie?

DOCTOR

Don't think Marie can help.

EDDIE

You have a self-satisfied smirk.

MARIE

(Hurt)

Eddie. That's not polite.

EDDIE

It's true, Marie. Look at the smirk on his face.

DOCTOR

(Making the cycling motion with his fists)

Like a bicycle, Eddie. No big mystery.

(He exits and immediately reenters, pushing a bicycle)

MARIE

He's been helping you like a friend, Eddie.

EDDIE

Reviewing the history of our relationship —

MARIE

I'm the only one in this office who can't ride. Please? Help me?

EDDIE

(Considers, then tentatively)

Sure.

DOCTOR

Mistake number one, Eddie. But okay, let's find out what it leads to.

*(**EDDIE** helps **MARIE** onto the bicycle)*

MARIE

Promise me you won't let go until I say it's okay.

EDDIE

Marie, I promise.

*(**EDDIE** pushes the bicycle offstage with **MARIE** on it. A crash is heard, then she screams. After another pause, **EDDIE** enters)*

DOCTOR

What happened, Eddie?

EDDIE

Well, I thought Marie was giving me the "let go" sign, so I did. But we had our signals mixed, and she wasn't ready for me to let go, and when I let go, she crashed into the wall.

(Pause)

She wasn't hurt badly. Just a scrape on her left knee.

*(**MARIE** appears, pouting)*

DOCTOR

A scrape?

EDDIE

I suppose so.

MARIE

You can do one thing to make up for this scrape on my knee, Eddie. Kiss it to make it better.

EDDIE

Okay.

(He does)

DOCTOR

What's that on your lip, Eddie?

EDDIE

Huh?

MARIE

I think it's a little bit of blood from my scraped knee.

EDDIE

I guess so.

(Takes out handkerchief and wipes lips)

MARIE

Oh, Eddie, I'd imagined you licking it from your lips with your tongue, not wiping it with a dirty handkerchief.

EDDIE

My handkerchief is clean, except for the blood.

DOCTOR

She's flirting with you, Eddie. She knows it was clean.

EDDIE

How would she know?

DOCTOR

It's in your character, Eddie.

MARIE

Oh, Eddie, there seems to be a little blood still on my knee.

EDDIE

Are you flirting with me, Marie?

MARIE

Probably, Eddie.

EDDIE

(Pause)

Guess what. I think I'll have to kiss that knee again to make it better. That's the least I can do, under the circumstances, I think.

MARIE

(As he awkwardly kisses her knee)

Oh, Eddie — you have no idea how it makes me feel.

EDDIE

Ready for another try?

MARIE

(Pause)

On the bicycle?

EDDIE

Well, yes. Is that what I mean?

DOCTOR

Picture it in your head, Eddie. Is there a relationship between Marie and the bicycle?

EDDIE

Well, I visualize Marie . . . and then she's falling off. . . .

DOCTOR

Deeper, Eddie.

MARIE

(Quiet)

Don't let him trick you.

EDDIE

You said he was my friend.

DOCTOR

Deeper, Eddie.

EDDIE

Give me a minute to collect myself, please.

DOCTOR

Deeper, Eddie. What's happening?

EDDIE

My head is . . . spinning, that's all.

DOCTOR

How come?

EDDIE

Well — my head must be spinning.

MARIE

I hope so.

DOCTOR

Deeper, Eddie.

(Eddie faints)

Eddie? Look what's happened, thanks to Marie.

MARIE

(Offended)

Hey —!

DOCTOR

Don't worry. It's all for the best.

MARIE

I never worry.

DOCTOR

*(Suddenly vicious, points to **MARIE**)*

Ah! That made the lights go out!

*(They both exit, and at the same moment a strange **FIGURE** in black with a black mask and pointed hat, holding a black megaphone to his mouth enters the rear of the room and poses as still as a statue. **EDDIE** lies unconscious on the floor. There is a pause, and then we hear **ESTELLE** calling from outside the room)*

ESTELLE

(Off)

Eddie? Eddie? Are you in there?

(Pause)

Eddie? This is Estelle.

MAN IN BLACK THROUGH MEGAPHONE

Oh! Eddie! This! Is! Estelle!

*(He turns and strides out mechanically as **ESTELLE** enters from the other side, not seeing him)*

ESTELLE

*(Bending over **EDDIE**)*

What took you so long to open the door, Eddie?

EDDIE

(Rising)

I was unconscious.

ESTELLE

Eddie! How come?

EDDIE

Well, it started, I think, when I was trying to help Marie learn how to ride a bicycle.

ESTELLE

I should have known she'd be involved.

EDDIE

Why are you so down on Marie?

ESTELLE

Because I think she's a no-good tramp, Eddie. Plus I'm jealous of the time you spend together.

EDDIE

Really?

ESTELLE

Yes.

EDDIE

I'm flattered.

ESTELLE

And a little flustered?

EDDIE

(Laughs shyly)

Well . . .

DOCTOR

(Entering)

Vanity, Eddie.

EDDIE

What?

DOCTOR

Don't let Estelle fluster you, Eddie. Keep your equilibrium.

ESTELLE

Right, Eddie. . . .

LOUD VOICE OVER SPEAKERS

Right!

ESTELLE

(Overlapping)

He's right of course.

EDDIE

He is?

ESTELLE

I think so, but I bet Marie wouldn't think so.

EDDIE

Oh no, she's his defender also.

ESTELLE

No kidding?

EDDIE

I detect a note of sarcasm.

DOCTOR

Learning about life, Eddie?

*(Offers **EDDIE** an apple)*

EDDIE

(Looks from one to the other)

I'm not sure. . . . I think I'm making progress.

DOCTOR

This perfect apple . . . is not edible, Eddie.

*(He tosses it away, and **EDDIE** runs to exit at the back but is immediately thrown back into the room with such force that he falls to the floor. The soft **VOICE** has already begun speaking)*

SOFT VOICE

Eddie went to Poetry City. He cracked his head on the sidewalk, trying to express something by taking a sudden, demonstrative plunge.

A stranger stopped and bent over the bleeding Eddie and said, "Can I help?" It wasn't like that, said Eddie, trying to smile, hoping the stranger would understand how appropriate a smile truly was under the circumstances.

*(As the **VOICE** continues, **EDDIE**, the **DOCTOR, ESTELLE**, and **MARIE** have moved to arrange themselves in a stretched-out line, holding hands, staring at the deep end of the room with their backs to the audience, as if in listening to the story the **VOICE** tells they expect it to be manifest somehow against the back wall)*

You're a lucky guy, Eddie — and the stranger helped him to his feet, glancing at his watch almost coincidentally. Be on your way sir, said Eddie. The blood was a miscalculation —

*(**MARIE** utters a piercing scream, and the line breaks, and they slowly find their way to seats, as the **VOICE** continues its story)*

— but it can be rectified by this handkerchief. What a beautiful handkerchief, offered the stranger, but it's true I'm behind schedule. You did all you could, said Eddie, and I'm in good shape — which allowed the stranger to be on his way, and Eddie to make a second try. This time it was well done and Eddie felt good in

the sunlight.

EDDIE

(After a pause, quiet and ecstatic)

Here I am. Totally okay.

MARIE

(Soft, as if not to frighten him awake)

Totally happy?

EDDIE

Yes.

(A loud noise knocks the three others off their seats to the floor)

ESTELLE

(After recovering, holding her irritation in)

Totally at peace?

EDDIE

Yes.

(Another noise, they are again thrown to the floor)

MARIE

(Recovering, trying to act calm and controlled and sweet)

What city is this?

ESTELLE

*(As **EDDIE** doesn't respond — he's too spaced out. In fact they all seem a little spaced out)*

Remember?

EDDIE

(Pause)

Where's a map?

MARIE

(A gentle threat)

Look in the drawer.

*(**EDDIE** goes and opens a drawer in the filing cabinet. He takes out a map and slowly starts unfolding it)*

ESTELLE

(Very slowly, deliberately)

It was the wrong . . . drawer.

EDDIE

Oh? . . . This is the wrong map?

ESTELLE

It was the wrong . . . drawer.

EDDIE

(Pause; he presses the open map to his chest)

So this is where we are now. Could I put this map of Poetry City on the wall?

MARIE

How?

EDDIE

(Pause)

Do you have any . . . thumbtacks?

MARIE

Wouldn't that . . . hurt the wall?

EDDIE

(Pause; considering this carefully)

Well, it would put very small holes in the wall.

(Pause)

It's okay, then?

MARIE

Best not.

EDDIE

Okay. I'll just fold it up and put it in my pocket.

*(**ESTELLE** has snuck up behind **EDDIE**. She pushes him violently into the wall; he bounces off, dropping a*

briefcase he's been clutching for security. He recovers and runs to the rear wall

*to escape, but miscalculates and bounces off that also, falling to the floor, and as he rises **MARIE** and **ESTELLE** are holding a metal bar above his head, so he lifts to his feet but clunks his head on the bar and reels dizzily to a chair, where he collapses)*

SOFT VOICE

*(As **EDDIE** tries to collect himself, slumped in the chair. And **MARIE** begins crossing the rear of the room, wearing high spiked heels, arriving at the rack, upon which she poses as the **DOCTOR** starts stroking her body with a towel as if erotically washing her arms and legs)*

Is this the city where
looking out the window
in late afternoon,
a beautiful vista seems dominated by the faint tracer-bullet
patterns of many automobiles in motion, evoking,
as they cross the visible-from-a-distance multitude of
bridges
spanning the magic river that gives mythic dimension to
this city
nestled in its curve
— automobiles evoking that specific seen-from-far-away
energy that
paints precise,
punctuated,
energy strips in the imagination of someone
who perhaps relies too much upon that same imagination?

*(**EDDIE** rises unsteadily to come forward to the audience)*

There he goes, encasing himself in a work of art —

(The noise of a small collision bounces Eddie back into his chair)

— in a prototype, at least.

EDDIE

*(**ESTELLE** is blindfolding him as he speaks)*

The darkness falls
I come hurtling toward you
In my language.

(He drops his briefcase, slides off his chair as if it were slippery, and as he continues talking, climbs onto the large table behind his chair)

Feet, head
arms and lungs
all exchange superior position
in rapid succession.
ESTELLE

(Softly mocking)

Office Party . . .

SOFT VOICE

*(As it speaks, a still blindfolded **EDDIE** reaches out to two table flaps and begins slapping them up and down a few times, like the wings of a giant bird)*

Outsiders howl
Insiders lift their skirts.
While everything on the opposite side of expectation,
plunges
into the landscape of
Oh — this remark, that remark.
Quick!
What I said was etched
In some kind of nonrefundable gold.
EDDIE

(Removing his blindfold)

If one anticipates the good moments too enthusiastically, it lowers one's resistance for being able to deal with the bad moments that come later, I suppose.

DOCTOR

What's that red blotch on your face, Eddie?

EDDIE

(Worried, feels his face)

What?

DOCTOR

I had you worried, I guess.

EDDIE

Yes —

DOCTOR

Be reassured, for the moment. You're okay.

EDDIE

But it certainly reminds me — something COULD go wrong, even with my own body, which up to now has been in pretty good health.

(He suddenly doubles over in pain)

Oww!

(But he fights back the pain and gingerly feels his way against one of the padded walls against which he places his body as if to calm it down. The others tiptoe close, to study him)

SOFT VOICE

Oh, Eddie, Eddie — you broke my heart with your stories about a brilliant childhood. I also, wanted to track down those elusive vapors. But when the duck pond froze, opened, and then recoagulated, where could the ducks go?

*(**EDDIE** moves away from them, uneasy at their proximity)*

How could they climb mountains, any of them, without my help? But I'm so weak, Eddie, compared to you. The pencil falls from my hand. I drift, slowly. And by the time the telephone rings, I've lost all cause and effect as a way to realize what I signed up for in the name of responsibility.

*(By now, **EDDIE** is leaning on one of the tables. Is he feeling pain again? We can't be sure)*

DOCTOR

What name did you use, Eddie? Right . . . "Poetry City."

SOFT VOICE

(As all but Eddie rearrange the furniture, making a veritable "Poetry City" of chairs and tables)

All of a sudden, slumped over my table, I regained my balance and attributed it to the natural magnetism of whatever it is I'm really leaning on. Because, you're still here, Eddie, and I resolve to make myself invulnerable . . . just like you.

DOCTOR

What's up, Eddie?

EDDIE

Well, a sort of . . . sharp, shooting pain.

DOCTOR

Where, Eddie?

EDDIE

I'm a little ashamed to say.

DOCTOR

Nonsense, Eddie. The human body is a wonderful machine. No part of it should cause shame or embarrassment.

EDDIE

Theoretically, I know that's right. But I can't help — OWW!

(He holds his groin)

DOCTOR

Apparently the pain is in your groin, Eddie.

EDDIE

Yes —

DOCTOR

Let's have a look.

EDDIE

Oh, no —

DOCTOR

You mean you don't want the pain dealt with? I might be able to help —

EDDIE

It's not that —

DOCTOR

Yes, Eddie?

EDDIE

I don't like to uncover that part of my body.

DOCTOR

Eddie, what have we just been saying?

EDDIE

I know, but —

DOCTOR

(Calls off)

Estelle, come in here, please?

EDDIE

I'd rather not have Estelle involved in this.

DOCTOR

Why not, Eddie?

EDDIE

Things about her.

DOCTOR

What?

EDDIE

Private things.

DOCTOR

What effect does she have on you, Eddie?

EDDIE

She smells . . . funny.

DOCTOR

Funny?

EDDIE

Funny.

DOCTOR

Funny?

EDDIE

(Soft)

Like raw apples.

ESTELLE

What do I smell like?

EDDIE

Jesus, she heard.

ESTELLE

Of course I heard you.

EDDIE

(To Estelle)

I was only looking for an excuse to keep you out of this situation. Because, pain — Well, it was suggested that you try and help somehow, but I don't think that's a good idea.

ESTELLE

Where's the pain?

DOCTOR

Tell her, Eddie.

EDDIE

Well, in the groin area.

ESTELLE

Is it in your penis, Eddie?

EDDIE

Well . . .

ESTELLE

Or maybe it's in your scrotum.

EDDIE

I think . . .

ESTELLE

Which?

EDDIE

Well, both maybe. It's hard to tell.

ESTELLE

That's because you haven't had much experience distinguishing between them, am I right?

EDDIE

Well, it IS the first time I noticed a pain in that area.

ESTELLE

I think you should let me look.

EDDIE

Okay.

(He sees the white medical screen that has been placed behind them)

Suppose I just get behind this screen for a minute.

ESTELLE

Oh, Eddie.

(He goes behind a screen that leaves his head and chest still visible. We can tell he's undoing his pants)

EDDIE

My pants are down, if you want to see.

DOCTOR

Go ahead, Estelle. Eddie's a little shy.

(She goes behind, her head disappears as she looks)

ESTELLE

Gee, Eddie, everything looks okay. Let's see if you can get an erection.

EDDIE

Well, I think so.

ESTELLE

Thinking isn't doing, Eddie.

(Pause, Eddie makes an effort, strains)

Yeah, that seems in order.

EDDIE

Yes.

ESTELLE

Nothing wrong with that erection, Eddie.

DOCTOR

May I look?

ESTELLE

Sure.

DOCTOR

Estelle's right, Eddie. That's a perfectly good erection.

EDDIE

I never thought I'd be showing such recent acquaintances my . . . ostensible tumescence —

DOCTOR

Oh, Eddie, sad to think you consider us strangers.

ESTELLE

As long as you have that good erection, Eddie, would you mind putting it into my vagina for a few minutes?

EDDIE

Well, okay.

DOCTOR

(*Looking down behind the screen*)

Thank goodness those attacks of pain seem to have subsided, though I probably shouldn't tempt fate.

EDDIE

(*To the **DOCTOR***)

I wish you wouldn't watch this.

DOCTOR

(*Turns back; pause*)

I have to admit, it's a kind of test.

EDDIE

(*Half orgasm*)

Oh.

(*The **DOCTOR** watches. **ESTELLE** withdraws and whispers, "Thanks." Goes and sits elsewhere*)

DOCTOR

(*Taking down the screen, and **EDDIE** has to hurriedly hitch up his pants*)

How about it, Eddie? Ready for a little psychoanalytic adventure?

EDDIE

Now?

DOCTOR

You know how it operates?

ESTELLE

Hi.

(*She waves*)

EDDIE

As I understand it —

DOCTOR

Shhh. Why don't we have a moment of silence?

MARIE

(*Racing into the room, carrying a notepad*)

Why don't I take notes?

(***ESTELLE*** *groans at* ***MARIE'S*** *pushing herself into the situation, and the* ***DOCTOR*** *and* ***MARIE*** *and* ***ESTELLE*** *go to a corner and gently move to the center of the room three big industrial drums made of cardboard. They look at* ***EDDIE*** *expectantly. He finally gets the idea and finds the fourth drum, which he moves forward to join the three others. Then the* ***DOCTOR, MARIE****, and* ***ESTELLE*** *put on party hats they find inside the drums. And* ***EDDIE*** *copies them and does likewise. Then the* ***DOCTOR, ESTELLE****, and* ***MARIE*** *reach into the drums and pull out wads of crumpled newspaper, which they throw up into the air so they fall to the floor, joining the papers that have been littering the stage from the beginning.*

The strident ***FEMALE VOICE*** *over the loudspeaker shouts, "Excuse me!" and the paper throwing stops and they all look at* ***EDDIE****. He looks at them, and then . . . copies them and reaches in for paper, which he throws about the room. He stops to see what happens next. The* ***DOCTOR*** *smiles, starts to exit, and stops*)

DOCTOR

(*To the audience, gesturing with his thumb to* ***EDDIE*** *and the women*)

Office party.

(*He exits; there is a pause*)

ESTELLE

(*Advancing on* ***EDDIE***)

Question for Eddie. Do you like a girl to be very verbal about her inner feelings?

(*She has backed him up against one of the industrial drums, and he bumps into it, and to recover his "cool" bounces up to sit on top of it, only he falls halfway in and ends up with his behind deep into the drum*)

Or more reticent?

EDDIE

(*Considers*)

It all depends.

ESTELLE

Depends?

EDDIE

Gee, Estelle. I think you're pulling me into very deep waters.

ESTELLE

Swim, Eddie.

EDDIE

(*Pause*)

Look, aren't you really asking — which of you two do I feel more attracted by?

ESTELLE

Yeah. We're asking.

(*Pause.* ***EDDIE*** *points to* ***MARIE****, then embarrassed at having made a commitment, hides his hand*)

ESTELLE

Never point, Eddie. Can't you say it?

EDDIE

Maybe I made a mistake.

ESTELLE

In not speaking? Or in the one you chose to point to?

EDDIE

(*Laughs*)

Suppose I did it through saying . . . Estelle.

(*As he says "Estelle," however, he rapidly points to* ***MARIE***)

ESTELLE

Why are you pointing to Marie if you're saying Estelle?

EDDIE

Come on, you understand why.

(***ESTELLE*** *goes and pulls* ***MARIE'S*** *hair*)

MARIE

Oww! Aren't you going to defend me, Eddie?

(*She pulls free*)

ESTELLE

I think he didn't want to tip his hand.

MARIE

Oh. He's saying, in effect, it's okay for YOU to physically attack ME.

(*Pause*)

I wonder if the opposite is true —

ESTELLE

Don't try it, Marie.

(***MARIE*** *looks at* ***EDDIE****, then tries to slap* ***ESTELLE****, who catches her hand, twisting her arm as* ***EDDIE*** *looks about nervously*)

MARIE

(*Writhing under* ***ESTELLE'S*** *grip*)

So. You're obviously stronger than me. I wonder how Eddie feels about that.

EDDIE

(*Running out of the room, embarrassed*)

I'll see you later.

ESTELLE

(*Dropping* ***MARIE'S*** *wrist and moving away*)

I guess you'd call me impetuous maybe.

MARIE

(*Rubbing her wrist*)

Men like that.

ESTELLE

Sometimes.

(***ESTELLE*** *turns to go, but* ***MARIE*** *suddenly reaches out and pulls her hair*)

Ow! Stop that!

(*Breaks away*)

MARIE

(*They face each other a moment, then **MARIE** turns to call to the next room*)

You missed something, Eddie! Estelle grabbed my hair and gave a good strong pull, which hurt like the devil!

(***ESTELLE** looks outraged at the lie, but **MARIE** ignores her and goes to the door to look for **EDDIE***)

ESTELLE

What do you see?

MARIE

He's sitting in the next room, reading something.

(***ESTELLE** comes to see. The **DOCTOR** enters and watches from the rear*)

ESTELLE

I don't believe you.

MARIE

Look for yourself.

ESTELLE

What on earth could he be READING?

DOCTOR

(From the rear)

Well, ladies?

(They are startled by him and whirl to look)

Interpersonal relations are structured like a circle.

(He revolves his fists like a bicycle again)

So I assume you're ready for a hundred-and-eight-degree reversal.

ESTELLE

Like what?

DOCTOR

Are you thinking about it?

MARIE

Not very effectively.

ESTELLE

Speak for yourself, Marie, darling.

DOCTOR

Oh? Estelle has a new idea?

ESTELLE

I think I might throw myself at Eddie.

DOCTOR

I thought that's what happened.

ESTELLE

Oh, no, I can be much more aggressive. Sometimes I do it to amuse myself —

*(The **DOCTOR** is whispering to **MARIE**)*

Hey, are you two trying to provoke me?

DOCTOR

Doesn't it say something, that you're so easily provoked?

ESTELLE

Wrong.

DOCTOR

Think about it.

ESTELLE

I don't consider that a viable option.

DOCTOR

Good.

*(**ESTELLE** sits)*

Try seriously NOT thinking — learn from Marie.

MARIE

(Offended)

I beg your pardon?

DOCTOR

(Turns to her)

A compliment, sweetie.

ESTELLE

Because we're women?

DOCTOR

(As he picks up another one of the strange curtain-on-a-stick structures, hanging the little curtain in front of ***MARIE'S*** *face)*

Oh, being ladies has nothing to do with it, because after all, Eddie makes the same mistake — if you see what I mean.

(***MARIE*** *immediately pushes through the curtain as* ***EDDIE*** *enters from the rear with his pants carried over his arm. He is in his underwear)*

DOCTOR

Don't get too big for your britches, Eddie. Careful, Eddie. Don't fall.

EDDIE

(Circling the room)

Where could I fall? I'm not near anything dangerous.

ESTELLE

(To herself)

Can you believe it? Eddie says "I'm not near anything dangerous." As a matter of fact, he's right. But nobody can take that for reality.

DOCTOR

(Holding out a box of matches)

Marie, would you light this match, please?

(***EDDIE*** *has stopped center stage, amid the industrial drums. He is staring forward, and somehow he doesn't register* ***MARIE****, crouched down at his feet, partially obscured by the drums, as she lights a match and seems to apply it to his shoe)*

MARIE

(Standing up in front of him)

Did you feel anything, Eddie?

EDDIE

No. When did Marie put in an appearance?

MARIE

I gave you a hot foot.

EDDIE

What's that?

MARIE

Oh, Eddie!

ESTELLE

(Whispers)

A hot . . . foot!

MARIE

You put a match in someone's shoe. Between the sole and the other part. Then you light it — with a second match.

EDDIE

Was that your idea?

(He holds up his foot to look at the damage, balancing precariously on the other foot)

MARIE

No.

EDDIE

Then why did you go along with it?

DOCTOR

Don't judge other people's motives, Eddie.

EDDIE

But I seem to be in a very vulnerable position.

(He is hopping about on one foot)

MARIE

More than me?

ESTELLE

More than me?

MARIE

More than ME?

ESTELLE

More than ME?

EDDIE

(He has lost his balance and fallen amid the drums. There is a silence. Then he slowly surfaces from behind one of them and speaks in almost a whisper)

Something's missing.

DOCTOR

What's wrong, Eddie?

EDDIE

Something's being left out.

DOCTOR

What could that be, Eddie?

ESTELLE

Is that why you have your pants off?

EDDIE

It expresses something.

ESTELLE

What's that?

EDDIE

(Thinks)

I have my pants off. . . .

ESTELLE

What's being left out, Eddie?

EDDIE

I came into the room, half undressed like this, in order to speak to you. . . .

DOCTOR

Yes, Eddie?

EDDIE

Well . . . about God.

DOCTOR

Ah, is that why Eddie made a sudden appearance in —

EDDIE

Don't say it!

ESTELLE

Is that why Eddie took his pants off?

EDDIE

(Red in the face now)

This expressed my stupidity, my crudeness and obviousness — all of which are NECESSARY!

DOCTOR

A preamble, as it were.

MARIE

(She has a glass of water which she presents on a tray)

Refresh yourself, Eddie —

*(The tray bangs into **EDDIE'S** chest as he reaches for the glass, which falls, and **MARIE** mutters, "Asshole," under her breath)*

DOCTOR

Careful Eddie, that was the ceremony of the spilled glass of water.

ESTELLE

*(As **EDDIE** starts racing about the room)*

This is the ceremony of the severed head.

EDDIE

I'm rendered irrelevant!

ESTELLE

*(As the **DOCTOR** repositions the little red curtain on a stick so **EDDIE** is behind it)*

What do you see, Eddie?

EDDIE

(Behind)

Red, mostly!

(He pushes through)

ESTELLE

The most attractive color, isn't it?

EDDIE

Red?

ESTELLE

Kiss me, Eddie.

EDDIE

(Still racing about)

I'm busy!

(A funny taped voice is heard speaking rapidly in crescendo — "Busy, busy BUSY, BUSY!" — and the man in black with the megaphone repositions himself in the shadows rear)

EDDIE

(Coming to a screeching halt. Making a decision)

Take off your clothes, Estelle!

ESTELLE

No go.

EDDIE

(Red in the face with embarrassment)

I want to understand my motives.

ESTELLE

No go, Eddie.

MAN IN BLACK WITH MEGAPHONE

(Preceded by a loud noise)

I! WANT! YOU! TO! UNDERSTAND! MY! MOTIVES!

*(**MARIE** has somehow reappeared in the room, wearing a number of colored panels strapped to her body. Everybody is frozen in shock for a few seconds)*

ESTELLE

Is she supposed to be imitating the good fairy?

EDDIE

Seriously, Marie, why are you dressed like that?

MARIE

Believe it or not, it gives me a feeling of power.

EDDIE

Oh?

(Pause; frowns)

You'd better go into detail.

MARIE

Whatever's passing through your head right now, Eddie, that's the power I'm talking about.

ESTELLE

(Sarcastically)

Is that supposed to be armor?

MARIE

Oh, no.

ESTELLE

Full speed ahead!

MARIE

I'd expect you to pick up on the silly aspect, Estelle — but there's more to it. It's magic, actually.

ESTELLE

We don't believe in magic

MARIE

*(Turns to **EDDIE**, as the **DOCTOR** and **ESTELLE** start making a repetitive series of gesture, as if magically invoking something in the room)*

What's going through your head right now, Eddie?

EDDIE

Oh . . . random. As usual.

*(Sees the **DOCTOR**, gets an idea)*

You're asking me to free-associate?

MARIE

Yes.

EDDIE

(Thinks, then begins)

Estelle, ding-dong dell
Red white and blue, pell mell,
Skin, nose, shit

Hey, this is getting a little embarrassing.

(Pause; he takes a deep breath to make another effort)

Estelle — I don't know WHY I keep saying Estelle — it's Marie I'm associating on really, but it comes out Estelle. Fuck-fuck-fuck! Hey, maybe I can't pierce Marie with my libido, because she's wearing a libido protector!

ESTELLE

Uh-oh, she's got you going through the back door, Eddie.

EDDIE

You mean Estell — MARIE'S! Private asshole?

(They all feign mock shock)

See? I started to say Estelle even THEN, and corrected myself.

*(Points to **MARIE**)*

Those could be reflectors she's wearing, so a thought goes to her, and bounces off and lands on you — Estelle.

ESTELLE

What I was trying to make you understand is there's a trick in it, because I know that actually, Marie has the hots for YOU, Eddie.

EDDIE

(Quiet, close to Estelle)

Do you believe in magic?

ESTELLE

Yes.

EDDIE

In that costume, I see Marie as a psychic tank. I'm waiting for her to come and roll over me.

*(**EDDIE** hesitates, then goes up close to **MARIE**. She circles around him and presses him up against one of the padded walls. He doesn't move. Nobody moves. Then there is a loud noise)*

MAN IN BLACK WITH MEGAPHONE

OKAY! WE! COULD! STAY! LIKE! THIS! FOR! A! LONG! TIME!

EDDIE

(After a pause, repeating the line under his breath, pissed off)

Okay. We could stay like this for a long time.

MARIE

(Moving away a step)

Get undressed Eddie.

EDDIE

(Showing her his pants, which he still carries)

Now? More than this?

(Pause; she doesn't give an inch)

Aren't you going to meet me halfway?

MARIE

No.

MAN IN BLACK WITH MEGAPHONE

RIIIIGHT!

MARIE

I just wanted to get you in my power. I'm going. But I'll be back.

(She exits, as does the man with the megaphone)

EDDIE

(Calling after her)

Marie? Is it perfectly okay with you that I'm undressed, alone in a room with Estelle?

ESTELLE

You're a free agent, Eddie.

EDDIE

(Thinks for a bit)

Well, to make this a little more comfortable, one of two things has to happen. Either you get undressed too, or I get redressed.

ESTELLE

Guess which.

EDDIE

No. On second thought, I think I'll DEAL with that lack of comfort.

*(**ESTELLE** has turned her back on him and is polishing her nails on her blouse)*

Maybe it can be a mental resonator.

*(**ESTELLE** turns, blows on her nails, which is in **EDDIE'S** direction, and as a mysterious tone is heard it's as if her breath blows him back into the padded wall, much to his surprise)*

ESTELLE

(Smiling at her demonstrated power)

"Marie?" Knows her stuff? Is that it?

EDDIE

(Worried)

Yes and no. Maybe.

*(He takes a step toward **ESTELLE**)*

ESTELLE

(Holding up a hand like a stop sign)

No. You're not going to kiss ME!

EDDIE

Frankly, I thought you were attracted to me.

ESTELLE

Frankly, I am. But there ARE other things in life, aren't there?

(She puts her hands on her hips and breathes in and out rapidly three times, a kind of yoga)

Poor Eddie. I do

think your relationship with Marie has deteriorated considerably over the last two hours.

EDDIE

Why were you breathing funny?

ESTELLE

Guess.

EDDIE

Were you imitating . . . a locomotive?

ESTELLE

You give yourself away, Eddie.

EDDIE

How do I give myself away?

ESTELLE

Try striking a pose like a certain famous statue.

EDDIE

What statue?

ESTELLE

Obviously, Eddie, "The Thinker."

EDDIE

I think too much.

ESTELLE

Just the pose, Eddie.

EDDIE

(Sitting, chin in hand — not quite correct)

Is this the pose?

ESTELLE

I think not.

EDDIE

This is how I remember it. Auguste Rodin's "The Thinker."

ESTELLE
It's wrong, Eddie.
But it serves a purpose.

(The lights are dim. ***EDDIE*** *sits dejectedly on his chair,* ***ESTELLE*** *is standing on a table with her hands on her hips, and the* ***DOCTOR****, in the rear, leans into a microphone and speaks quitely)*

DOCTOR

Eddie was on the train to Poetry City.

(***ESTELLE*** *again breathes three times in a sharp, puffing rhythm. Then she kneels, offering* ***EDDIE*** *an apple*)

Then he took a particular drug that altered his consciousness, but Estelle said, "Look Eddie, it's a perfect apple." Why did Eddie want to alter his consciousness?

EDDIE

I had remembered to ask myself, Why did I want to alter my consciousness at a time when altering my consciousness seemed self-evidently a desirable thing to do? I was not interested in thrilling experiences, believe me, I was interested in self-development, I told myself. Potential development of my potential, that was the way I circled my subject.

(*He has walked slowly toward the audience. The three others are holding three small paintings that represent red theater curtains in line behind his head*)

I was on this . . . train. And I took this . . . drug. It was not that I expected experience to come rushing toward me. I did expect experience, but experience was not the aspect toward which I traveled, with pleasure.

(*The paintings are manipulated, and the other side shown — three still-lifes with a skull prominently featured*)

SOFT VOICE

I was on a train to Poetry City, and an image came into my mind. I saw visionary fields. I was on a train to a dead city. From the window of that train, I saw amazing transformations of the landscape.

SOFT VOICE AND EDDIE
Because whatever was dead

was dead, and when I saw that
I was able to function
as I hadn't been able to function. . . .
EDDIE

(*Alone in the room now*)

. . . when I didn't know the dead, was the dead.

ESTELLE

(*Reenters with* ***MARIE***)

Whatever is dead, Eddie, is dead. It's useful to be able to make such distinctions.

MARIE

Eddie agrees, or Eddie wouldn't be visiting.

ESTELLE

I think he's looking for an escape route —

EDDIE

Am I?

ESTELLE

You tell me.

EDDIE

Poetry City. Please.

ESTELLE

Of course, Eddie. But I don't know if you like living in paradise. Feel the ground shifting under your feet?

EDDIE

(*Sits*)

That's not desirable.

ESTELLE

Feel it?

EDDIE

No.

MARIE

He must have a problem.

(*She exits*)

EDDIE

(*As* ***ESTELLE*** *reshows her skull painting*)

Maybe it isn't paradise after all.

ESTELLE

Don't count on it.

EDDIE

You convinced me.

ESTELLE

Not quite. I cut through the whole question with a single flash of my double-edged blade saying, "Happy to have you on board, Mr˙ Sliced-in-Two!"

EDDIE

Funny, it didn't hurt.

ESTELLE

That's a provocation, but I won't bite.

EDDIE

Thank goodness.

ESTELLE

From your point of view of from mine?

MARIE

(*Reentering with a new painting*)

Let's change the subject a little —

(*She holds up the painting, which is a face, very white, with strange decorations*)

Is Eddie frightened by THIS wonderful painting?

EDDIE

I don't recognize it.

MARIE

How come?

ESTELLE

It looks a little like Eddie. Before and after.

EDDIE

Before and after what?

ESTELLE

Notice?

EDDIE

I like it.

MARIE

You do?

(*Pause*)

Tell me again — you really like it?

DOCTOR

(*In the rear, in the shadows, he echoes what's being said in whispers into the microphone, overlapping before they've finished*)

You really like it?

EDDIE

(*Coming downstage to push through an imaginary curtain*)

Yes.

DOCTOR

Yes

ESTELLE

Then there's nothing more to be said, is there?

EDDIE

(*A pause, very quietly*)

Burn it.

DOCTOR

Burn it.

MARIE

Ah. Because you like it so much?

DOCTOR

Because you like it so much.

EDDIE

Exactly.

ESTELLE

What a spiritual trip.

MARIE

You really want it burned?

DOCTOR

You really want it burned?

EDDIE

Yes.

MARIE

Then I'll take it into the next room, where we always perform such rites of sacrifice.

DOCTOR

I'll take it into the next room.

ESTELLE

*(As **MARIE** goes upstage)*

Maybe you want to watch?

EDDIE

No. I trust you.

ESTELLE

(Smiles, whispers)

No.

*(Points to **EDDIE'S** head)*

I trust . . . YOU.

VOICE OVER THE LOUDSPEAKER

Riiiiiight!

SOFT VOICE

*(As the **DOCTOR, MARIE**, and **ESTELLE** move, rearrange the furniture, and put up streamers as decoration for an anticipated "Office Party")*

Here's the main thing. You're looking for an escape route, a method of locomotion, a secret door. You can't find the secret door, because it isn't in this world, but in the other: the one you want to escape to. It isn't in this world —

*(**EDDIE** is feeling the wall, looking for the door as the others watch)*

— it's located in the world you want to escape to. So use it.

MARIE

Use the secret door.

EDDIE

Everything looks different.

ESTELLE

Wrong.

EDDIE

But it looks different!

ESTELLE

(Smiles, standing by the rack, where the small red curtain has been removed and a tiny dollhouse room is revealed perched on top of the rack — a room that is a close model to the one in which they are in fact located)

This is it.

EDDIE

What?

ESTELLE

This is it.

EDDIE

What?

ESTELLE

The room . . . in which God speaks to us, Eddie.

EDDIE

I don't believe you.

ESTELLE

How come?

EDDIE

I don't believe you.

ESTELLE

How come you don't believe me?

EDDIE

It doesn't look like the right kind of room.

MARIE

Suppose I told you I didn't really burn that valuable painting?

EDDIE

Did you?

ESTELLE

(Behind him)

It sneaks up on you.

EDDIE

(Whirls)

What does?

ESTELLE

What did you say, Eddie?

EDDIE

I said, "What sneaks up on you?"

ESTELLE

(Getting irritated)

Well . . . maybe a phone rings. Maybe somebody knocks and you think lunch is being delivered —

EDDIE

It's too late.

ESTELLE

What time is it, Eddie?

EDDIE

I lost my watch.

ESTELLE

(Crossing to the filing cabinet, flipping out loose pages so they add to the mess on the floor)

Then we'll just have to find it for Eddie, since Eddie can't pull it off for himself, and in MAKING an extensive and deliberate search — guess what! We don't seem to come up with anything VALUABLE and all of a sudden the phone rings —

EDDIE

(Reaching for a ringing phone)

I didn't know you had a telephone.

ESTELLE

(As the phone is grabbed away from him)

You MUST have known because you TELEPHONED!

EDDIE

(Grabbing back at the phone)

Excuse me while I make a telephone call!

*(In a fast whirling struggle, they get the phone back, and the activity leaves **EDDIE** stymied and out of breath. He takes a moment to recover, and his expression darkens)*

EDDIE

What happened to seeing God?

ESTELLE

It's taken care of.

EDDIE

I didn't hear the phone.

ESTELLE

It's taken care of, Eddie.

(There is a pause; the room is dim. ***EDDIE*** *goes and looks at the dollhouse room on top of the rack. Then turns back and speaks quietly)*

EDDIE

It's snowing.

ESTELLE

(Whispers to herself)

Forever.

EDDIE

(Sits)

Don't try to turn me into a little boy.

ESTELLE

Why not, Eddie. It's a bedtime story.

EDDIE

Time for bed?

ESTELLE

No.

EDDIE

Yes.

ESTELLE

It's not a sexual overture, Eddie.

EDDIE

It's getting personal.

ESTELLE

In what sense?

EDDIE

Okay. Tell me about what really manifests in this room.

ESTELLE

Either . . . or.

EDDIE

Yes. Tell me.

ESTELLE

No. Be . . . REALLY interested.

EDDIE

I am.

ESTELLE

(After a pause)

Okay. I'm not who you think I am.

EDDIE

Who are you?

ESTELLE

(Very softly)

I'm Eddie.

EDDIE

Prove it.

ESTELLE

I just did.

EDDIE

How?

ESTELLE

(Turns away)

Ah, too dumb to figure THAT one out!

MARIE

(Entering)

Let's take a vote.

EDDIE

(Whirling)

On what?

ESTELLE

Oh, Eddie, you know on what.

EDDIE

No. Really I don't!

MARIE

All in favor?

ESTELLE

Me.

MARIE

Opposed?

(A pause)

You're not opposed, Eddie?

EDDIE

I don't know what's up for consideration.

ESTELLE

Mystery, Eddie.

EDDIE

I'm not opposed. I'll take the risk — anyway, no matter how I voted I'm outnumbered, aren't I?

(They turn their backs and walk out on him and he calls after)

Hello? Am I locked in here?

(He sits quickly and talks to himself)

Why do I assume that? But I think I'll stay anyway.

(He looks

about the room, and whispers)

Gods? Here I am. . . .

(A pause)

What a disappointment that nothing happened.

*(**ESTELLE** and **MARIE** reenter and begin talking as if they never left — but in the rear, in the shadows, unseen by either **EDDIE** or the two women, a Godlike figure with a halo and long white beard slowly edges into the room, holding a painting under his arm)*

ESTELLE

In your element, Eddie?

EDDIE

You're trying to be mysterious.

ESTELLE

(Mocking him)

It's "snowing."

EDDIE

I don't think so.

MARIE

Eddie doesn't believe in what he believes in.

EDDIE

You think you mean gods that I don't believe in, but I do — my own.

MARIE

(At a mike now, she whirls and shouts into the mike, while pointing at the God figure in the shadows)

Here's one!

EDDIE

(Still not seeing him)

You anticipate that long before it happens.

(As he speaks, he turns, and steps back, shocked to see the figure)

MARIE

I told you it would happen.

ESTELLE

What she didn't tell you was that it would come into our world through YOUR door.

MARIE

But maybe that's just our own perspective on things.

ESTELLE

Did Eddie remember to burn a particularly wonderful painting?

MARIE

Look at that painting he's carrying!

ESTELLE

*(As the **GOD** lifts his painting, which is the same white Eddie-like face that **MARIE** had ostensibly taken out to burn)*

But Eddie! It's your favorite painting!

MARIE

*(Whirls to face **EDDIE**, running backwards to crash against one of the padded walls)*

You mean HE'S Eddie?!

ESTELLE

What does that explain?

EDDIE

Isn't anybody else surprised to see a godlike manifestation?

ESTELLE

We're not sure what it is.

GOD

*(Thundering yet childlike voice — in fact, the **DOCTOR**, muffled under a God mask)*

I . . . AM!

MARIE

(Acting frightened)

Sure?

GOD

Yesss, very sure.

(He bangs the painting down on the table)

EDDIE

A painting that returns from the dead either wasn't dead, or else has regenerative powers related to a god's interest in such a potent image.

MARIE

(Hurrying to Eddie)

It's wonderful that you and your god have the same taste in paintings.

EDDIE

I'm not sure about that anymore.

MARIE

Careful, Eddie, he's the sacred messenger.

GOD

May I speak?

EDDIE

Does a god have to ask permission?

ESTELLE

Weren't you shocked at the timbre of his voice? It wasn't expectedly godlike, was it? Which implies, on my part, how much happier we'd all be if he, or it, DIDN'T speak.

*(Unnoticed by everyone, the man with the megaphone has managed to reappear at the rear, in the shadows behind the **GOD**. There is a pause, and as if **EDDIE** has forgotten his next line, the man with the megaphone suddenly bellows out through his megaphone, "MAY! I! LOOK! AT THE! PAINTING!" **EDDIE** looks irritated, as if worried the audience will realize he's forgotten a line. He bites his lip, and then speaks in a kind of mumble of embarrassment)*

EDDIE

Right. May I look at the painting.

(But he doesn't move to go to it)

MARIE

Do you really like it?

EDDIE

I think so.

MARIE

*(As **ESTELLE** runs out and returns with three snow shovels)*

Should we reburn it?

EDDIE

I don't think so, since it was remanifest in such a miraculous way.

VOICE ON TAPE

RIIIGHT!!

*(As **EDDIE** speaks, music is building, and **ESTELLE** distributes the shovels, and then as the **GOD** lifts and lowers his painting in a ritualistic pattern, **EDDIE** follows the lead of **ESTELLE** and **MARIE**, and all three circle the awesome **GOD**, and to deafening organ music, start shoveling as if they were heaving dirt over the image of the **GOD** and his painting — as if they were burying him.*

Each time they throw imaginary dirt, some flies back into their eyes and painfully blinds them, from which they quickly recover and regroup and reshovel — after three shovels and three blindings, they throw down their shovels and are so full of crazy energy that they lift a heavy table and march around the room carrying it high in the air, finally collapsing in exhaustion as the music fades)

EDDIE

(Out of breath)

Sometimes it's definitely chaotic.

MARIE

I wouldn't use that word for a miracle.

EDDIE

You think it's a real miracle?

MARIE

Well, let's say yes.

ESTELLE

*(Having grabbed the picture from the **GOD**, she shoves it in **EDDIE'S** face)*

Hey, you must love pictures more than you love anything, Eddie.

EDDIE

(Pushing the picture away)

That's not completely true.

*(Behind their backs, the **DOCTOR** has been removing his mask and halo, and now he leans forward aggressively)*

DOCTOR

Shall we BURN it, Eddie?

EDDIE

(Sees him. Turns away. Talks to himself in their presence)

I'm encasing myself in a work of art. You know what that means?

DOCTOR

Yes indeed.

EDDIE

My life really.

(He is at one of the microphones)

That's why I wanted to burn a painting I liked so very much. A distraction, right?

VOICE OVER LOUDSPEAKER

RIIIIIGHT!

EDDIE

(Very quietly)

My name is Eddie and I plan to escape to Poetry City.

DOCTOR

Escape?

EDDIE

Don't be upset if I tell you, you participate in a life I find oppressive.

MARIE

Why, Eddie?

EDDIE

I find oppressive, life that is not centered, continually, on concern for the human spirit. That has to be the center.

DOCTOR

But Eddie, you've described life as it is here, where you are this very minute.

EDDIE

In a hidden sense, maybe.

DOCTOR

(As he and the women start to wiggle in a kind of dance)

Not hidden, Eddie. It wobbles perhaps, because that's the human condition.

EDDIE

Wobbles?

DOCTOR

Yes. You know — wobbles.

*(They demonstrate for **EDDIE**, wobble-dancing across the room)*

MARIE

Wobbles, Eddie!

ESTELLE

WOB-BLES!

EDDIE

It's true, I wobble when I walk

DOCTOR

(Shouting over the dance and music)

Be careful Eddie — you're going in circles —

EDDIE

What?

(Music abruptly cuts)

DOCTOR

(Freezing)

I didn't say anything.

EDDIE

I thought you did.

(A frozen silence)

I was talking to myself.

DOCTOR

Talking to yourself!?!

ESTELLE

Oh, Eddie!

*(**EDDIE** is, as if magically, thrown by their disapproval against one and then another of the padded walls, being bounced around the room as the **DOCTOR** and **MARIE** and **ESTELLE** all shout one additional disapproving "EDDIE!" and the loud **VOICE** booms out over the loudspeaker)*

LOUD VOICE

(Deafeningly)

You're disturbing the other guests!

EDDIE

(Shouting as he careens out of control about the room)

What guests?

LOUD VOICE

You're time is up! You're being evicted for disturbing the neighbors!

EDDIE

What neighbors!?

LOUD VOICE

You won't get away with this outrageous behavior! I swear you won't goddammit!

*(**EDDIE** has collapsed in a corner)*

I swear you won't get away with this! If it's the last thing I do. I won't let you get away with this outrageous behavior!

*(Very slowly, **EDDIE** picks himself up and sees the others, seated, staring at him)*

EDDIE

(Quietly, nervously)

Why is everybody looking at me?

DOCTOR

You're in a play, Eddie.

EDDIE

I'm not in a play!

DOCTOR

You're in a play, Eddie.

EDDIE

No.

(He comes slowly forward toward the audience)

I'm not standing in bright light. I'm not in front of hundreds of people. I'm talking . . . language. But I'm in the middle of my own life.

*(They each suddenly grab a flag — one of several that have been standing about the room in floor stands, and point the flag poles directly into **EDDIE'S** body, flags trailing on the floor, focusing on **EDDIE** — and he contracts in fear)*

Hey!

ESTELLE

Remember, Eddie, poetry melts language.

EDDIE

Debatable pleasure, maybe. Hacked off parts of the body.

DOCTOR

Offered by the mouth, Eddie.

EDDIE

(Quiet)

Okay. If this were a play —

DOCTOR

Tell us about it, Eddie.

EDDIE

If this were a play, a curtain would be drawn.

(He steps forward, through an imaginary curtain, as the others drop their flags and run to different corners of the room and bend over to whisper in microphones)

And the audience would be in darkness.

DOCTOR

(Far upstage)

No. If this were a play, a room would be visible into which one would project one's imagination.

*(As he speaks, a giant head floats in behind him, and seems to stare downstage at **EDDIE**)*

ESTELLE

Would a line of dialogue suddenly emerge from the silence of dimly illuminated space?

EDDIE

(Pause)

No. If this were a play . . . the room would be crowded with men and women in evening dress. Cigar smoke would hover in the air . . . and a chosen someone would lean forward as if his face were exploding.

(He puts gentle fingers up to his face)

He wouldn't speak, because he wouldn't have to. But he would speak.

(All break from their positions as the lights brighten)

DOCTOR

*(Speaking with a rhetorical flourish as a thin white cord is stretched with **MARIE'S** help from his hand to **EDDIE'S** chest)*

Oh Eddie,
why retro-relax —
MARIE

(Whispers an echo)

Retro-relax

DOCTOR
When you can dazzle me effectively?
You have NO story to tell,
so —
you're a WINNER!

*(**EDDIE** turns away from the string that pins him)*

You WANT a story to tell
so you can believe in the world?
My message is quite the opposite.
Believe no longer
You made it happen,
but the happening got stopped.
That is to say —
The WORLD GOES ON!

*(**EDDIE** has turned from the string, and retrieves the box from the beginning of the play that was described as holding his lunch. **MARIE** and **ESTELLE** have repositioned the string so that it cuts across **EDDIE'S** path, like a finish line through which he must push himself, but he hesitates)*

MARIE

Lunch, Eddie.

EDDIE

That's all?

DOCTOR

Isn't that enough?

EDDIE

Is that enough?

MARIE

Take what's yours, Eddie. It's wonderful.

EDDIE

(Hesitates)

I don't think I'll look inside.

ESTELLE

Don't you remember? You already peeked.

EDDIE

Did I? I don't remember.

ESTELLE

*(As she collapses the string and **MARIE** retrieves it)*

Matched? Outwitted?

MARIE
Eddie's experiences were profound.
For that reason, he triumphs.

*(**MARIE, ESTELLE**, and the **DOCTOR** are picking up three-foot wands from various hiding places in the room, and they circle **EDDIE** and apply their wands to his body so he is pinned in space between them, at the center of a radiant circle)*

DOCTOR
It was not his own doing, of course.
He seized the "seize-me."
EDDIE

Seize me.

(Pause. He remains at the center of the network of wands)

If I told the truth

*(**ESTELLE** and **MARIE** sigh audibly, and the circle revolves slightly)*

If I told the truth about all things, guess what?
It wouldn't be MY city you'd be visiting.
Follow this?

*(They all allow their wands to drop with a clatter, and all three go off in different directions leaving alone at the center of the room. **EDDIE** crosses to a table to deposit the box with his lunch)*

All things have their own —
shall we call it a sense of direction?
I wanted to participate in a real world
but then it just got so painful.
Here's what happened.
I ordered lunch, but to my amazement,
I arrived in a city so confusing, it was homogeneous in that, at least.
Which was comforting, to some.
ESTELLE

What city, Eddie?

EDDIE

That's what made it a different kind of city. It wasn't necessary to move, in the sense of moving on, see what I mean?

*(**ESTELLE** runs to **EDDIE**, kisses him on the cheek, and then goes quickly to the back of the room)*

You interrupted my train of thought! Should we call that polite, or think about it?

DOCTOR

*(Coming forward as **EDDIE** goes rear, when **MARIE** recovers his face with one of the small red curtains on a stick)*

Eddie thought ideas got pressed between the pages of a book like fruit, so the sweet flow of ideas could run down over his fingers like rose water. That made him think of his own potential beauty, interior and exterior, and so he combed his hair.

EDDIE

(Pushing through the red curtain to speak, brushing away imaginary cobwebs as he does so)

Eddie looks out over the city and it speaks to him. But how does an entire city form words? Phrases arise in Eddie's head, no question about it. He turns to Marie as if to speak, then hesitates.

MARIE

Marie senses his hesitation and says, "Eddie, are you trying to put feelings into words?"

EDDIE

And Eddie turns the pressure in his throat into a smile, and directs his gaze toward the window, that isn't there.

SOFT VOICE

"Look at me" is what Marie feels an urge to shout, but that doesn't mean she is in any way arguing with Eddie. They go for a drive.

*(In the shadows rear, the God figure reappears, walking very slowly, a giant now on tall shoes, carrying a white box — the very image of the box resting on the table with **EDDIE'S** wonderful lunch. As the **VOICE** continues, **EDDIE** and **ESTELLE** and the **DOCTOR** move and gesture during its speaking)*

Where did the automobile come from? Eddie was about to say — I borrowed it from a relative named . . . Father, but he was long since dead so that couldn't be possible.

(Eddie sees the God figure — his father? And moves toward him, then hesitates, and slowly retreats, covering his eyes)

Was Eddie dead? No, just because there was a certain problem with certain words coming or not coming out of his mouth, even after they had well started inside his throat, where did they disappear? Maybe Eddie was dead, and his father was alive in him or not in him and look — speeding around a corner a man in a checkered jacket — go slow, said Marie under her breath, and where did those words come from, thought Eddie?

*(The God figure has slowly brought his box to rest on top of the box **EDDIE** had placed on the table. The God figure slowly turns and begins to drift out the other side of the room, in a shaft of dim light)*

But the man who was not Eddie's father cast his eyes down the street toward the car, which he definitely heard make a noise. And something in that maneuver vanished, or wasn't there to begin with. Certainly it wasn't Eddie, or Marie either, but a part of the city that decided to appear through Eddie, and he tried not to be too preoccupied, but still it vanished as he noticed the man looking in their direction. I almost, exclaimed Eddie, decided to stop the car and run over to the man to tell him how much he looked like my father. This was later at a cocktail party.

*(**EDDIE** and **MARIE** and **ESTELLE** quickly change positions, exchange glances, then look away from each other)*

Eddie was drinking soda water. He spilled some of it on his jacket, but it

was soda water.

(Eddie wipes at it)

Eddie wiped at it, rather more "blotted" it with a napkin. That was that. He closed his eyes — just for a second — and listened to the hum of conversation that was going on around him rather than to here or there a specific word or phrase.

*(**EDDIE** has covered his eyes. And **ESTELLE** is watching him. He uncovers his eyes, looks to **ESTELLE**, and she — unable to receive his gaze — covers her own eyes quickly and turns away)*

By the time he had opened his eyes, only about three seconds had elapsed and whoever it was he was talking

to hadn't moved. It wasn't Marie — she wasn't even at the cocktail party. And Eddie smiled and looked across the room and waved at someone almost imperceptibly, and he wondered if anybody noticed, and then he thought — of course, whatever I do, people notice.

*(The God figure, about to vanish from the room, has slowly turned back toward **EDDIE** and lifted his hand, slowly, in greeting)*

And to verify that for all time, as it were, he heard a voice saying "You waved, Eddie." And he tried to imagine somebody in the room waving back. The effort made the room shimmer, slightly, under his eyes.

(The God figure is gone, and they all stumble slightly)

Was it a shimmer? Something sped around his head in a circular motion. And Eddie forgot where he was, but a voice brought him back to reality, saying, "Eddie, are you paying attention?"

ESTELLE

(After a long pause, tears in her eyes)

Eddie, have you really seen God?

EDDIE

Of course not.

ESTELLE

Marie says you have.

EDDIE

(Pause)

But there's no way of knowing, is there?

ESTELLE

One can have one's opinions.

EDDIE

(Sadly)

That's all they are, really.

ESTELLE

Opinions.

EDDIE

Right.

ESTELLE

(Sadly)

Right.

DOCTOR

(Aggressively)

Right!

VOICE OVER THE LOUDSPEAKER

RIGHT!

ALL

(Leaping into the air in place, and shouting in desperate defiance)

RIGHT!

(They fall back from their leap and stumble a bit, then recover and rush from the room in opposite directions — but at their respective exits, each bounces back as if from an invisible wall and turns and exits running in the opposite direction, as the voice on the loudspeaker continues barking out words)

VOICE ON SPEAKER

Right! Right again! Right! Right still! Right completely! Totally . . . RIGHT!

(The music builds, the lights fade, then the music cuts. The play ends)

THE END